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PART XIV.

ESCAPE OF OFFICERS AND MEN FROM GERMAN SHIPS INTERNED IN THE UNITED STATES.

The Secretary of State to the German Ambassador.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

No. 1661.]

Washington, November 16, 1915.

EXCELLENCY: With reference to the German vessels and crews now interned in American ports, I have the honor to call your attention to the following facts relating to the escape from time to time of certain paroled officers and men from these vessels.

On October 10, 1915, six officers, Vizesteuermann Heinrich Hoffman, Heinrich Ruedebusch, Wilhelm Forstreuter, Erich Biermann, and Ing. Aspirants Julius Lustfeld and Walter Fisher, of the German cruiser *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, interned at Norfolk, Virginia, received permission to go ashore and to return by eight a. m. October 11th. These officers have not been seen since, and are supposed to have departed on board the yacht *Eclipse*, which was purchased by Vizesteuermann Hoffman shortly before their departure.

On September 29, 1915, Marine Stabsarzt, Dr. Kruger Kroneck, and Lieutenant zur See Koch, of the German cruiser *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, were given permission to go on a visit to New York City and Niagara Falls and to return to their ship on October 16th. These officers, however, have not returned to their ship and were seen in the Pennsylvania Railroad Station, New York City, on October 17th.

The German cruiser *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* arrived in American jurisdiction on March 10th, 1915, and was interned on April 9th, 1915. On March 10th, the Commanding Officer was directed to allow none of his officers or crew on shore for the present. The Commander acknowledged the receipt of this notice and stated that he would act accordingly. On March 12th the Commanding Officer asked permission for his officers and men to go ashore, if they did not leave Newport News. On March

17, 1915, two days prior to the granting of the Commander's request, the Executive Officer, i. e., the second officer in command, Otto Brauer, left the ship. The Department now has reliable information that Brauer has returned to Germany and is on duty on board the Cruiser *Lutzow* at Danzig.

Doctor Nolte was granted leave of absence from the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* to go to Newport News and Old Point Comfort, Virginia, and return on May 13th last. Doctor Nolte has not, as yet, returned to his Ship.

On or about June 14, 1915, Herman Deike, Engineer Officer of the *Locksun*, interned at Honolulu, left his ship and is yet absent in violation of his parole.

In view of the apparent disregard of these members of the complements of the interned vessels at Norfolk for their word of honor while on parole, the Navy Department, on October 14, 1915, was under the necessity of ordering that no officers or men be allowed to leave the ships until the absent officers and seamen had returned.

Notwithstanding this order, on October 15, 1915, two members of the crew of the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* attempted to board the Dutch steamship *Maar Tensdyk* at Newport News, in an endeavor to escape. Seaman Sturm was apprehended and his companion, Seaman Kasper, returned to the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* of his own volition. Also, on November 12, 1915, Fireman Thiery was found absent from the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* at muster, having escaped from his ship.

The incidents related have occurred notwithstanding the fact that at the time of the internment of these vessels each Commanding Officer gave a pledge for "himself, officers, and crews not to commit any unneutral acts and not to leave limits prescribed in paroles." I therefore regret to have to inform Your Excellency that the United States Government regards the actions of these men as contrary to its express instructions and as breaches of the honorable conduct to be expected of officers and men of visiting and interned ships of war of a belligerent nation, and that consequently the Government has been forced to discontinue the custom of paroling the interned officers and men on their honor and otherwise to circumscribe the very liberal privileges which they have heretofore been allowed to enjoy.

It will be recalled that during the Russo-Japanese war, when the Russian Ship *Lena* was interned by United States Authorities on the Pacific coast, three officers of that ship escaped and returned to Russia;

and that upon the Government of the United States calling the matter to the attention of the Russian Government it immediately caused the escaped officers to return to American jurisdiction, where they were interned for the remainder of the war.

This precedent this Government regards as in accord with the best practice of nations and applicable to the cases which I have had the honor to present in this note.

I have no doubt, therefore, that upon Your Excellency's calling these incidents to the attention of the Imperial German Government, that Government will promptly direct that Otto Brauer and any others of the men mentioned who may now be within German jurisdiction, or who may hereafter come within such jurisdiction, be promptly returned to this country for internment with their respective ships.

Accept, etc.,

ROBERT LANSING.

The Secretary of State to Ambassador Gerard.

[Telegram—Paraphrase.]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, November 17, 1915.

Mr. Gerard is informed that the Department of State in a note dated November 16, 1915, called the attention of the German Ambassador at Washington to the escape at intervals of certain paroled German officers and men from ships interned in United States ports. The German Ambassador was also given full facts, giving officers' names and the circumstances under which they escaped. The ambassador's attention was called to the case of the escape during the war between Russia and Japan of three officers of an interned Russian vessel, and that the American Government called the matter to the attention of the Government of Russia, who immediately caused the return of the escaped officers to American jurisdiction. The Ambassador was informed that this precedent is regarded as in accord with the practice of nations in the past and as applicable to the cases which are cited in the Department's note. The Department also stated that it had no doubt that the Ambassador would bring the facts promptly to the German Government's attention and that the German Government would direct the prompt

return to the United States for internment with their respective vessels of the escaped officers and men who may now be or who may hereafter come within German jurisdiction.

The German Ambassador to the Secretary of State.

J. Nr. A 7545.]

GERMAN EMBASSY,
Washington, November 22, 1915.

MY DEAR MR. SECRETARY: The Commanding Officer of H. M. S. *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, informs me that the officers and crews of the interned German Cruisers at Portsmouth Va., are to be photographed by an order of the Commandant of the Navy Yard at said place apparently as a means of preventing further escapes. Captain Thierichens for obvious reasons before complying has asked for further instructions. I realize that the deplorable escapes of the past, although inspired by patriotic motives, justify strict methods of surveillance, but believing that effective measures already have been taken to insure further escapes I would appreciate it greatly if these officers and crews could be spared the humiliation of having their photographs taken.

I am, etc.,

J. BERNSTORFF.

The Secretary of State to the German Ambassador.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, November 23, 1915.

MY DEAR MR. AMBASSADOR: I am in receipt of your letter of the 22d in regard to the photographing of the crews of the interned German cruisers at Portsmouth, Virginia.

I have had a conversation with the Secretary of the Navy on the subject and we have reached the conclusion that in view of the objections raised by the Commanding Officers of the cruisers the photographing of the crews will not take place at the present time.

I can assure you that it was with no purpose of humiliating the Germans who are interned that this plan was proposed, but you must realize that the violation of paroles by certain of the officers and members

of the crews of these vessels has caused much embarrassment to this Government. I am convinced that you, as well as the Commanding Officers, are desirous that the honor of the German Navy should be preserved, and that the authorities here should apprehend any who violate their word. As the most expedient and practical plan of accomplishing this was to have the portraits of those who might escape published, it was thought well to photograph all the members of the crew as well as the officers. I can not see, in view of what has occurred, why there should be any objection to this being done, but since it is so we will take other means to prevent a repetition of the escapes, although I consider that the redoubling of the vigilance of our Naval authorities is even more humiliation to the interned than to be photographed.

I am, etc.,

ROBERT LANSING.

The German Ambassador to the Secretary of State.

[Translation.]

J. Nr. A 7586.]

GERMAN EMBASSY,
Washington, November 24, 1915.

MR. SECRETARY OF STATE: Pursuant to your kind note No. 1661 of the 16th instant, I first called in the commanding officers of H. M. S. *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and *Prince Eitel Friedrich* for an explanation of the disappearance of some members of their crews. It appears from their report that the following petty officers left their ships in a dingey at about 4 o'clock on Sunday, the 10th of October: Quartermaster Ruedebusch, Hoffmann, Biermann, Forstreuter, Engineer Aspirants Lustfeld and Fischer. The commanding officer of H. M. S. *Kronprinz Wilhelm* reported the occurrence to the Commandant of the Newport News Navy Yard on the 15th ultimo. How the fugitives made good their escape could not be ascertained. Marine Staff surgeon Dr. Kruger-Kroneck and Lieutenant Koch have not returned from the leave that was granted them. The clandestine disappearance of Dr. Kruger-Kroneck is all the more unaccountable as he, being a physician, might have obtained release from internment in the same way as it was accommodately granted to a number of surgeons of the interned ships. Press reports indicate that Lieutenant Koch is now a prisoner in England. The

present whereabouts of all the other absconders is not known to me or their superior officers.

Captain Lieutenant Bauer was still on board *H. M. S. Prinz Eitel Friedrich* on March 16, but was no longer there on the 17th. Until then the commanding officer had no other directions than that of letting no one go on shore and had accordingly notified his officers and men that there was no shore leave to be had for the time being. Not until the 19th of March did he receive permission for his crew to get leave to go to certain defined places on land: "Officers on parole and men under guard of American soldiers." Captain Lieutenant Koch therefore could not have broken his parole, but merely disobeyed orders. There can be no question, therefore, of his being sent back to the United States on the above-stated ground.

As for the seamen, Sturm and Kasper, they left the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* as early as October 14; their attempt to escape took place before the time when the Navy Department's order that no one should leave the ship became known to the ship as October 15, it being dated October 14.

I believe the foregoing particulars will prove of some help in clearing up the matter, which I have reported to my Government.

Accept, etc.,

J. BERNSTORFF.

Ambassador W. H. Page to the Secretary of State.

[No. 2708.]

AMERICAN EMBASSY,
London, December 16, 1915.

SIR: I have the honor to acquaint you that on December 3rd I received from H. M. Foreign Office a note, a copy of which I attach herewith,¹ requesting that enquiries be made of the German Government concerning the identity of one Lieutenant zur See Henry Koch, who recently escaped from internment at Norfolk. This enquiry was accordingly transmitted to the Embassy at Berlin on December 7th, with the request that the desired particulars might be obtained.

On December 6th Lieutenant Koch, who is now detained at Edinburgh, addressed a communication to the Consul there who immediately transmitted it to this Embassy. Copies of Koch's letter and

¹ Not printed.

the Consul's letter of transmittal were presented to H. M. Foreign Office on December 13th, and I have the honor to transmit herewith copies of these two communications.

No reply has been made by this Embassy to the suggestion made in Lieutenant Koch's letter to the Consul at Edinburgh.

I have, etc.,

WALTER HINES PAGE.

[Inclosure 1.]

Consul Fleming to Ambassador W. H. Page.

AMERICAN CONSULATE,
Edinburgh, December 8, 1915.

SIR: I have the honor to report that Lieut. Henry Koch, German naval officer, is a prisoner of war in Edinburgh Castle. He was taken off the Danish S. S. "*Tyskland*," bound from New York to Copenhagen, at Lerwick, Shetland Islands, on the 14th November, 1915. Lieut. Koch was an officer on the interned German auxiliary cruiser "*Prinz Eitel Friedrich*," lying at Portsmouth, Virginia, and fled in the early part of October, with the intention of reaching Germany *via* Denmark. Lieut. Koch shipped on the S. S. "*Tyskland*" as a member of the crew.

A letter addressed to this Consulate by Lieut. Koch is herewith enclosed.

I have, etc.,

RUFUS FLEMING.

[Inclosure 2.]

Lieutenant Koch to Consul Fleming.

EDINBURGH, *December 6, 1915.*

DEAR SIR: I was officer on board of the interned German auxiliary cruiser "*Prinz Eitel Friedrich*" lying in Portsmouth, Va., have flought out of the American internment and have been taken from a neutral ship in England. If it is possible that the United States Government grants to me indemnity because of my flight, I beg the United States Embassy, at the same time representing my own Government in this country, to ask the British Government for its agreement that I dare return on my own costs to United States of America and into the American internment.

I think to be condemned to inactivity in the same degree in America as in England, especially after an attempt of flight. Further I would not cause any expenses either to the British or to the American Government.

Yours truly,

KOCH.

The Secretary of State to the British Ambassador.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, December 22, 1915.

MY DEAR MR. AMBASSADOR: I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your personal note of December 18, 1915, stating that you are informed by your Government that there is now in detention as a prisoner of war in Great Britain an individual who gives his name as Lieutenant zur See Henry Koch, and states that he has escaped from internment at Norfolk, Virginia. You add that the British authorities are anxious, if possible, to obtain confirmation of this prisoner's statements as to his identity and rank.

In reply you are advised that Koch was interned with the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, that on September 29, 1915, he and Dr. Kruger Kroneck were given permission to visit New York, to return to their ship on October 16, and that they never returned to the cruiser. Koch is described as being thirty years of age and five feet eight inches tall, having blue eyes, good teeth, no beard or moustache, speaking fair English, and weighing about one hundred and sixty pounds. At the time of the internment of the vessel, the commanding officer gave a pledge for "himself, officers, and crew not to commit unneutral acts and not to leave limits prescribed in paroles."

I am, etc.,

ROBERT LANSING.

The Secretary of State to Ambassador Gerard.

[Telegram—Paraphrase.]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, December 22, 1915.

Mr. Gerard is directed to inquire at the German Foreign Office as to whether the matter of the escape of interned German officers and men

has been called to the attention of the Foreign Office by the German Ambassador in Washington, and if so to urge that the representations of the Department of State to the German Ambassador be promptly replied to by the German Government. A report by cable is requested.

The Secretary of State to Ambassador W. H. Page.

No. 3046.]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, January 7, 1916.

SIR: The Department has received your despatch No. 2708, of December 16, 1915, in which you enclose copy of a Foreign Office note requesting that enquiries be made of the German Government concerning the identity of one Lieutenant zur See Henry Koch, who recently escaped from internment at Norfolk.

In reply, you are informed that the Department has upon request given the description of Lieutenant Koch, escaped intern, to the British Ambassador here for purposes of identification. The Consul at Edinburgh should reply to the Lieutenant's letter by stating that, in view of the breach of parole involved in his escape from internment, no representations will be made to the British Government looking to his return to the United States.

I am, etc.,

ROBERT LANSING.

Ambassador Gerard to the Secretary of State.

No. 2496.]

AMERICAN EMBASSY,
Berlin, February 21, 1916.

SIR: With reference to my telegram No. 3508 of February 19, 1916, I have the honor to transmit herewith to the Department a copy and translation of the Foreign Office's Note, dated February 16, 1916, regarding the escape of officers and men from the German auxiliary cruisers *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, at present interned in American ports.

I have, etc.,

For the Ambassador:
J. C. GREW.

[Inclosure—Translation.]

No. III a 2610.

31366.

FOREIGN OFFICE,

Berlin, February 16, 1916.

The undersigned has the honor to inform His Excellency, the American Ambassador, Mr. James W. Gerard, in answer to the communication of December 24, 1915, regarding the escape of officers and men from the German auxiliary cruisers *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, at present interned in American ports, that the matter has been brought to the attention of the German Naval Administration. According to the investigations made by the latter, the commanders of the two auxiliary cruisers, unfortunately, did not sufficiently instruct their officers and crews regarding the significance of the "assurance" ("Versicherung") given by them. Moreover, the expression "pledge" chosen by Rear Admiral Beatty in his letter to the commanders does not conform absolutely to the idea of the "word of honor" (Ehrenwort). The persons who escaped, therefore, were obviously convinced that they would not, through their act, render themselves guilty of a breach of their word of honor.

The German Government acknowledges the fact, however, that the members of the crew—and only they—who escaped after the "assurance" ("Versicherung") of the commanders had been given on April 13 and May 5, 1915, respectively, were in the wrong towards the American Government, and that they are to be sent back to their vessels. Of the persons mentioned in the note of the American Government to the German Ambassador at Washington of November 16, 1915, No. 1661, the following are therefore concerned: Marine-Stabsarzt Krüger-Kroneck, Leutnant zur See Koch, Dr. Nolte, Vize-Steuermann der Reserve Hoffmann, Vize-Steuermann der Reserve Ruedebusch, Vize-Steuermann der Reserve Forstreuter, Vize-Steuermann der Reserve Biermann, Ingenieur-Aspirant der Reserve Lustfeld, Ingenieur-Aspirant der Reserve Fischer, Heizer Thierry.

Of these persons, only Stabsarzt Krüger-Kroneck returned so far to Germany. He will be instructed to return to his vessel as soon as the American Government has obtained safe-conduct for him from the hostile Governments.

The German Government states expressly that by the return on board his ship of Stabsarzt Krüger-Kroneck the question is not touched whether, after his return, his release later on may not have to be granted

in accordance with the Hague Convention regarding the application of the rules of the Geneva Convention to naval warfare.

In requesting to bring the foregoing to the attention of the American Government, the undersigned avails himself, etc.,

ZIMMERMANN.

The Secretary of State to Ambassador Gerard.

[Telegram—Paraphrase.]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, March 9, 1916.

Mr. Gerard is informed that the reply of the German Foreign Office regarding the escape of officers and men of the German Cruisers at present interned in ports of the United States was referred to the Navy Department. In reply the position is taken by the Navy Department that the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* and the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* sought refuge in an American port and agreed to be interned. Therefore, the obligation of remaining with their vessels rested wholly with the officers of those vessels.

That these officers are not cognizant of the principles of international law can not be assumed. Promises were given in writing by the captains of the two vessels for themselves, the officers, and the crews of the vessels that they would in no way violate American neutrality during their internment. It seems to be indicated by the answer of the German naval administration that it does not appreciate fully the seriousness of the obligation assumed thus by their naval representatives on the two vessels in question to remain within the assigned limits with the minimum of trouble to the Government of the country in which they are interned. They were considered as guests of the American Government and not as prisoners of war, and as such guests permission was given them to leave the navy yard and to visit on leave any part of the United States. Lieutenant zur See Koch and Doctor Kruger Kroneck, after having availed themselves of the permission mentioned to leave the limits of their internment, failed to return as they were unquestionably bound to do. Furthermore, money was supplied by Doctor Kroneck with which the yacht *Eclipse* was purchased by six officers of the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* who escaped from the jurisdiction of the Government

of the United States. Should the return of Doctor Kroneck be effected the Government of the United States should not consent to his release under the application to naval officers of the Geneva Convention rules, as on account of considerable sickness on the interned ships his presence on board is necessary. No mention is made in the reply of the German Foreign Office of Otto Brauer, the Executive Officer of the ship *Prinz Eitel Friedrich*, who left that ship after the Captain of the vessel had been requested by the Government of the United States not to give permission to his officers or men to go on shore, which request was acknowledged by the Captain who stated that he would act in accordance therewith. It can not be conceived by the Navy Department that the Executive Officer, the next in command, was ignorant of this request of the Government of the United States. The departure of Otto Brauer, the executive officer, was taken against this Government's express direction, and the Navy Department is of the opinion that he should be returned to the jurisdiction of the Government of the United States. Also in the case of the engineer officer, Herman Dieke, of the *Locksun*, interned at Honolulu, who, while on parole, absented himself, no reply is made. The full reply of the Navy Department is being sent by mail to Mr. Gerard, who is directed to present the views of the Government of the United States, and to say that the Department would be glad to have an early reply.